

ITALY

Translation

Monday 14 March 1994

la Repubblica - Daily (page 17 - full page)

A survey reveals the most enjoyable and relaxing activities of the Europeans

MY PLEASURE

**Result of the study: coffee, smoking, alcohol
are not that bad for your health after all**

Sex has moved down to the tenth position on the list

by ELISABETTA MIRARCHI

ROME - The advocates of asceticism are forewarned: giving up the small pleasures of life may be good for the soul but could also endanger your psychological and physical health. Whereas enjoying a good glass of wine or a cigarette, or sipping a cup of coffee is good for the nerves and improves your health. This is one of the results of a study which was carried out by Associates Research In Substance Enjoyment (Arise) and which will be presented in Rome today by the Hypotheses agency. A sample of 2,042 citizens in Italy, France, Germany, Spain and England provided two lists of what are considered enjoyable and relaxing activities. It was discovered that the Europeans consume most of their "pleasures" within the walls of their homes, which they regard as a kind of fortress: the list is headed by family and children, followed closely by books and magazines. No transgressions so far. But of all places, it is at home that the so-called "vices" take root. In spite of the numerous and ever stricter prohibitions and messages concerning one's health, quite a few of the people that were interviewed choose to relax with exactly those "legal" substances which are accused of being harmful: coffee, alcohol, tea, cigarettes and chocolate. An other result: "sex" has dropped to tenth position on the list of pleasures, perhaps because of the fear of Aids, while it has completely disappeared from the list of relaxing activities. It seems that Europeans find a nice bath and watching television more soothing. So let us look in more detail at the answers that were given with respect to some of the pleasures that Europeans are most fond of.

COFFEE. Together with tea this is the preferred beverage, alone or in company. Its effect differs, however: it gives a boost to the Germans (36 percent), the Spaniards like it mostly because of its "taste" (56); the French, decidedly passive, drink it out of "habit" (47), while the Italians drink coffee purely for "pleasure" (27). It is not by accident that they drink it several times a day, in contrast with their European colleagues. An interesting detail: women in particular are especially fond of tea and coffee in a good 10 percent of the cases.

ALCOHOL. After coffee, an alcoholic drink. The persons questioned rigorously observe the accepted custom. They do not drink because they enjoy it, but in order to

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forget their everyday cares and worries. The list is headed by the English (43 percent) and the Germans (22), who, in addition to using it as a sedative, are among those who like to take a drop several times a day. The Italians (8 percent) do not use alcohol to relax so much but drink mainly for "pleasure", a pleasure which is considered to be a "social activity" by only 4 percent. On the opposite end of the scale we find the English (53 percent), the Germans (38) and the Spaniards (33) who like to drink in company.

CHOCOLATE. About this, the persons questioned betrayed no sense of guilt at all. Whether it is in the form of bars, drops or coins, chocolate is eaten for "pleasure" only. It is especially appreciated by the French (55 percent), followed closely by the Italians (53). Digging through the data, we find that women in particular are responsible for raising the average. The Italian women, however, leave the competition far behind: 53 percent eat chocolate for "pleasure" compared to 31 percent of the men. Are they looking for consolation?

SMOKING. The fact that this is last on the list of pleasant activities speaks volumes about the hostility that surrounds smokers. The more so, since smoking jumps from 19th position to tenth position on the list of most relaxing activities. A cigarette, or a pipe as the case may be, has multiple effects on the persons questioned: it is relaxing, gives pleasure and tastes good as well. The following differences were noted: especially for the English (42 percent) and the French (45 percent), smoking is a habit; the Italians smoke for the same reason but feel somewhat guilty about it: 21 percent considers smoking to be "one of the few vices" they allow themselves (the European average is only 9 percent).

SEX. Goodbye to burning passion! It seems that the Europeans have closed the doors against love. Strange as it may be, sex has been relegated to tenth position. In other words, after magazines, coffee, radio and television... But don't worry. The Italians (83 percent) have contributed to raising the European average (71 percent) and put sex in fourth position on the list of "pleasures". To tell the truth, they are the only ones. Setting aside the English, who, in accordance with popular belief, are last on the list, even the Spaniards (68) betray the myth of the latin "macho" and must give precedence to the Germans (72) by a wide margin. One item among the collected data merits closer study: as far as desire and pleasure are concerned, the European women, including the Italian women, score 20 percent lower than the men.

A HOT BATH. It is really true: this is the highest ambition of the Europeans (82), but above all of the Italians (92), when they come home from work. It heads the list of activities that people consider relaxing. And once they have showered to their heart's content, they want nothing more than to flop down in a chair with a magazine or in front of the television. Meanwhile, the children can wait. It must be said however, that the children of Italian parents are luckier than their European contemporaries: at least they do not have to wait until their parents have finished their relaxing "gymnastic exercises". And besides, there are also parents who prefer to relax by playing with their children (65 percent), while the English (35 percent) find this considerably less entertaining.

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Open warfare against health risks or less of the more "noxious" substances

"Dangerous or beneficial", the scientists are divided

Many scientists have tried to find the answer to the question whether widely consumed pleasure-giving substances are dangerous, or, on the contrary, beneficial. Confusion, however, reigns supreme.

Take coffee, for example: according to the "Lancet", the well-known English scientific magazine, it causes high blood pressure, myocardia, even cancer of the urinary tract; moreover, it will cause diabetes in children of mothers who used it (Toumlehto). From the accusations to the defence: coffee reduces the risk of cancer of the colon (Rosenberg); one should drink it because it prevents breast cancer (Hunter). All sorts of bad things have been written about tea: at the end of the nineteenth century it was believed that it would reduce one's intelligence; while according to Cramer, in many cases it is the cause of infertility (Cramer). The opinion about alcohol is divided as well. Though English doctors used it to cure fever, typhus and rheumatism, in more recent times an alcoholic is considered to have a higher chance of getting Aids (Ware); smokers run the same risk (Hunt). On the other hand, several studies conducted by the National Heart Institute (Usa) lead to the conclusion that a small amount of alcohol will reduce the risk of infarction.

Asked about these different results, David M. Warburton, coordinator of Arise and Director of the Psycho-Pharmacology Department of the University of Reading (England) says: "In medicine there are two different criteria for interpreting reality: if the data indicate that something pleasant is harmful, this proof is accepted and published. If, however, it appears that this pleasure giving substance has positive effects, it is considered dangerous and ridiculous."

"Our fellow creatures are a decent lot; all they care about are their homes and families, a cigarette, a drink and a little sport"

But what happened to the taste of forbidden fruit?

by GUIDO ALMANZI

"Quel dommage que ce ne soit pas un péché!" said the Renaissance lady while eating an ice cream in Stendhal's splendid paradox (What a pity it isn't a sin!). Something which is not really allowed is more fun. The main argument of the study, that deprivation can cause much larger damage than a slight addiction to, for example, harmful substances, or to habits that are basically unhealthy, is so obvious that only the most ferocious moralists, enemies of pleasure because it is pleasure, can oppose it.

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It is disturbing to see the catastrophic return of American Puritanism, which has been running rampant in so many different areas in recent years after a clear decline at the end of the Prohibition period.

It is amazing, however, to see how decent our fellow creatures are. All they care about are their homes and families, a couple of good books, playing with their children, a cigarette, a small drink, a bit of sport, a game of cards and some chocolates. Are these the pleasures of the Europeans? I am astonished. Looking at the sales figures of magazines and television ratings, I have compiled a rather different list of pleasures: leafing through magazines with pictures of nude women (of maybe nude men), listening to mindless songs; peering through the keyhole at the lives of the rich and famous to discover which well-known television star is sleeping with which soccer or tennis player; enjoying a "blow by blow" account of the amatory technique of Moana Pozzio or Amintore Fanfani; looking at horror movies or watching scenes of violent slaughter; tormenting countries outside the Community or making fun of Bonga Bonga; and so on.

And what about those pleasures that even the most audacious comedians never dare to mention? Karl Kraus talked of the exquisite satisfaction of a military conscription clerk, who gave someone a fine of two crowns for not obeying a call up! And the satisfaction of a section leader who keeps a subordinate standing in front of his writing-desk in the presence of strangers?

Nobody has ever admitted to feeling the desire (rarely satisfied) to touch a nun's behind. The English poet W.H. Auden asserted that it is a universal pleasure to read one's own writings and to smell one's own farts. And masturbation? Why is it not included among the fundamental and universally popular pleasures? Decried by theology in earlier centuries, and by medical science in the last century, this very ancient practice has finally become accepted almost without restraint, and is now almost encouraged by certain sexual liberation groups. It is a pleasure that hurts neither oneself nor other people and which is extremely useful to relieve "the strain of modern life". Portnoy, the hero of a novel by Philip Roth, led a normal life despite certain youthful excesses ("before lunch, after lunch, during lunch": I have always wondered how he managed it during lunch).

One must also keep in mind that pleasure is a very broad concept: pleasure is abstaining from smoking (how satisfying to overcome such a frequent and common temptation!), pleasure is smoking; pleasure is abstaining from drinking, pleasure is having a drink; pleasure is following a diet, pleasure is stuffing oneself; there is the pleasure of anorexia and of bulimia; the pleasure of chastity and the pleasure of indiscriminate sexual activity; the pleasure of lolling about and the pleasure of frantic activity; the pleasure of the oppressor and the pleasure of the oppressed; the pleasure of the man who is on top and of the woman who is underneath; or vice versa, as related by Giovanni Boccaccio in the story of Calandrino (and the man becomes pregnant). Was the pleasure that the Eternal Father must have felt after creating such a senseless world, where shall I put it?

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Which do you consider the most relaxing activity

	Europe	Italy
Taking a bath or a shower	82	92
Reading a book or a magazine	76	80
Watching television	67	72
Doing gymnastic exercises	54	47
Playing with the children	51	65
Drinking coffee	49	50
Eating something else	46	49
Drinking tea	40	36
Eating chocolate	36	26
Smoking	28	30
Drinking alcohol	20	8
Meditating/Yoga	14	10

Source: Market & Opinion Research International (Mori)

Which habits do you consider to be pleasures?

	Europe	Italy
Family and children	86	90
Reading a book or a magazine	83	86
Holidays	83	89
Spending time with friends	82	79
Drinking tea or coffee	78	81
Listening to the radio	76	70
Watching television	74	80
Going out for lunch/dinner	74	70
Sex	71	83
Shopping/Spending money	64	72
Going the cinema/theater	60	63
Doing sport	59	64
Eating sweets	53	52
Drinking wine, beer/ other types of alcohol	50	60
Smoking	31	31

Source: Market & Opinion Research International (Mori)

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